

[Picture of The Bible Code book] I was in college when the book *The Bible Code* became popular. The book claimed that the Bible contained secret messages - prophecies about JFK's assassination and more. I was sitting in one of my New Testament classes, taught by my favorite professor, and someone asked, "Dr. Reeves, what do you think about *The Bible Code*?"

I remember my professor put his head down for a moment, probably swearing silently to himself and wondering why he came to class today. Then he looked up and completely blew my mind. He said, "I think we have a hard enough time doing what the Bible says clearly that we don't need to worry if it has any secret messages in it."

My jaw was on the floor because he was absolutely right. We spend a lot of time obsessing about hidden spirituality, acting like God's will is mysterious, hard to discern. We love secret gospels and hidden codes.

But the reality is, the Bible is really clear about quite a lot. Yes there's some difficult stuff, some big questions that are worthy of our doubts and work. But there is a *lot* in the Scriptures that is plain. And particularly when it comes to God's will for our lives, how we are to live and what it means to follow Jesus, the problem isn't that God's will is hidden. It's that it's difficult.

[Sin Goggles] We don't see the world as God does. The theological term for this is Sin - Sin blinds us to the way of God. It's like from the day we're born, we wear these glasses that distort everything we see and experience. We've worn them so long, we don't even know the world could look any other way.

Learning to see the world God's way - the way the world really is, is difficult. There's a reason several authors in Scripture compare it to being reborn. It's like relearning *everything*. And it doesn't "just happen" to us. If we want to learn to live free of Sin, if we want to learn to see the world God's way so we can live in freedom as we were created to live, it takes time and effort.

[Jesus is My Homeboy] Part of the reason we struggle to see the world God's way is that we're unaware there's even a problem. We assume God sees the world largely like we do. God is American. God is the same political party as me. God has the same priorities I do. God hates the same people I hate.

In fact, God loves me a lot and the only thing God really cares about is that I just quit doing so many bad things (which really are just a little bad - quit cussing so much and not yell at my kids on the way to Church and actually do that stuff my spouse keeps asking me to do and quit impulse spending). But really, God and I have so much in common that once I make a few tweaks, everything will be fine and dandy.

But God's way is wholly different from ours. God's perspective is so different from ours, several theologians call it "upside down". So today, we're going to investigate God's perspective and see how different it is from ours.

We're in a series called [w]hole. We're asking what a whole, healthy human life looks like. To find the answer, we're beginning with Jesus' response to a question he was asked:

One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

This was a common question rabbis of Jesus' day debated. The root of the question is getting at what it means to be fully human - which of God's laws is the summation? Which most perfectly encapsulates what it means to be a people of God?

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." -- Mark 12:28-31

Jesus' answer frames our series: in one sense, it's a twin command - Love God and love others. But Jesus' command is also four-fold. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength. During this series, we're using these four aspects of our humanity as a lens to examine our own lives.

Sin doesn't emerge fully grown. You don't burnout in one day. You don't wake up one day distrustful of people who aren't like you. We didn't get into this farce of a political system all at once. We don't decide to hate and take revenge in an instant.

Sin begins as small seeds within us. And God offers us these lenses - heart, soul, mind and strength - as opportunities to examine ourselves carefully, to seek out the seeds of sin and pluck them out of our lives before they can take root and grow into something ugly and painful.

First, we learned that loving God with all our hearts means with every desire we have - both the spiritual and the fleshy. Last week, we saw that to love God with all our soul or self means we have to maintain healthy, strong boundaries that ensure we have the energy to fulfill our God-given calling. Today, we ask what it means to love God with all our minds.

This word presents a slight problem for us because it only appears in the Greek. When Jesus answered this question about the greatest commandment, he was quoting a command that originally appeared in Hebrew. And in Deuteronomy 6, where this command originally appears, there are only three words. We are to love God with all our heart, souls and strength (which is next week).

Jesus spoke Aramaic, which is sort of a daughter language of Hebrew. Our New Testament was written in Greek. So we're reading Greek translations of Jesus' original words. The Hebrew word *nephesh*, which we translate "soul" or "self" has a pretty broad range - it can mean a *lot* of stuff.

To love God with all our *nepshesh* takes a lot of our selves, and apparently the guy who wrote Mark decided it took *two* Greek words to convey all Jesus meant by *nepshesh*.

The best way to figure out what these words mean is to look at where else they show up in the New Testament. And what we find when we trace *mind* through the New Testament is that loving God with all our mind isn't really a question of intelligence (which is good because it shouldn't matter how smart you are when it comes to loving God!). Rather, "mind" is really perspective. It's how we see the world. What glasses are we wearing to see the world?

[World Lens] It's not hard to discern the lens of our world, especially with the election days away. We see everything in terms of Us vs Them. My country vs. their country. My culture vs their culture. My candidate vs their candidate. My vision of the Good Life vs. theirs.

Us vs Them is really about safety and security. Protection and prosperity. I want to keep what I have and get more of what I don't. If you dig into Us vs Them deep enough, you'll uncover a foundation of selfishness. Selfishness, Pride, is the original human sin. It manifests when we shake our fist at God and insist, Not thy way but my way.

[Scripture Slide] If you have a Bible, turn with me to Philippians 2. This is a letter Paul wrote to the Church in the Greek city of Philippi. Paul has been reflecting on what it means to be part of the Church, challenging them to love each other, work together, not be selfish. Then he breaks into a song - one the Philippians sang when they worshiped together. This song grounds his instructions in what Jesus did for us:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. -- Philippians 2:5-8

[God's lens] God's way is upside down. Instead of Me first, it's Me last. Instead of safety and security, it's risk. Instead of protection and prosperity, it's poverty. Jesus gave up his position on the throne of heaven, his privilege as the firstborn of all creation, to come to earth, to be born helpless, impoverished and powerless. Jesus gave himself over to death.

Not for his own good, but for ours.

And Paul says, have that same attitude. The Greek word there is *mind*. You want to love God with all your mind? Then we have to learn the mind of Jesus. We have to see the world the way God sees the world. We have to become selfless, not selfish. Rather than us vs. them, we must put others ahead of ourselves. And we must love our enemies, work for their good, pray for them rather than fight them.

Friends this is not natural for us. We have seen the world through the lens of sin since birth. We struggle even to imagine saying a single kind word about our enemies, much less pray for them and give them good gifts that contribute to their flourishing. But, our Us vs. Them mentality is anti-Christ.

Giving our minds to God takes time and work. But we can do it. In another letter - this one to the Romans, Paul challenges the believers there:

Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. -- Romans 12:1-2

Don't copy the behaviors and patterns of this world! Let God change the way you think. Then you'll know God's will. Another writer said it this way:

They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. -- 1 Peter 1:12-15

Prepare your minds for action. Exercise self-control. Learn to live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living. You didn't *know any better then*. But now, be holy in everything.

Loving God with all our minds takes intention on our part. We can't just pray a prayer one time in our lives and expect we're transformed and perfected in God's new life. We work out our salvation - the Spirit moves in us, and we respond.

(The good news about this bit is that we're not working on our own. God's Spirit lives within us and gives us the strength to become new.)

[Reading Scripture] Spiritual practices keep us in the Spirit, listening to the Spirit's voice in our lives and poised to respond. A practice particularly helpful to the renewing of our minds is the *Lectio Divina* or "Sacred Reading". Reading Scripture is a wonderful way to know God's perspective on the world. A person who does not regularly read Scripture has the wrong perspective. It's like you're walking around with those SIn Goggles on, the world you see twisted and distorted.

But reading Scripture is difficult. The Bible is 2,000 years old, written by cultures very different from ours. If you've ever tried to read Scripture, you know it can be a frustrating task. This is where the Sacred Reading comes in. This process is designed to help you hear God's voice speaking through the Scriptures. It has three stages.

First, choose a passage that's not too long - a chapter at most. Read through the chapter slowly, taking in the text.

Second, read the text again, and this time, pay attention to a word or phrase that sticks out to you. Note the word or phrase.

Finally, read the text a third time. This time, prayerfully ask God, "What shall I do?" and focus on the word or phrase that stuck out to you. After you have completed the third reading, spend a few minutes in silent prayer or journaling, meditating on the Scripture you've read and consider what you're hearing from God.

The Sacred Reading is a technique Christians have used for hundreds of years to learn to hear God speaking through the Scriptures. As we immerse ourselves in what God said to our ancient fathers and mothers, we learn to see the world as God sees the world. We learn to hear God speaking to us today.

We read Scripture because we recognize that our minds are dark, that we've been wearing Sin Goggles our whole lives. We confess we don't know how to see the world the way God sees the world. [Eye Chart?] We need a Spiritual Eye Exam.

Is my job just something that pays the bills, or do I have a vocation, a calling from God to contribute to the flourishing of the world?

Is that person my enemy, or are they my neighbor, a person who bears God's image, who is worthy of love and forgiveness?

Is my position in our culture something I'm entitled to, or is my privilege a gift I am obligated to leverage for the cause of justice?

Is the Church a place I come to receive or a people to whom I give what God has given me?

Is the most important thing in my relationships that I am right, or that we are unified?

Friends, my professor was right: God's will is not difficult to discern. The Scriptures are clear about much we simply ignore. If we want to love God with our whole minds, we must take off the Sin Goggles we've been wearing since birth.

We heard Paul's challenge to the Church in Rome to let God change the way we think. He spends the rest of Romans 12 offering some concrete, practical insight into what that looks like. This week, I want to challenge you to do a sacred reading of Romans 12 every day this week.

That's right. Read it. Then read it again the next day, and the next day, and the next day. Each day, ask God to renew your mind, to change the way you think. To take off your Sin Goggles and flip your mind upside down.

What might you see in your family when you begin to see them as God does? What might happen in your work as you begin to see what you do as a holy calling not just earning a paycheck? Where might you discover a surprising new friend or inject some peace into the world because you refuse to see those who disagree with you as enemies?

How we see the world matters. How we see each other matters. How we see people different from us matters. God has not made it difficult to know his will. So will you love God with all your mind this week?

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide]